

Building of an Officer's House

The building of an Officer's House in the period 1847-51 at Moose Factory followed from the new demands placed on the post after the merger of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North-west Company in 1821. With the passage of time, the old star-shaped Factory building built in 1735, had become increasingly unsuitable for purposes of accommodation. Chief Factor Robert Miles described the situation in October of 1842;

"I much regret Philip's [Turner] absence, as our factory is now become in such a ruinous state, that it is not a fit residence for the Gentlemen, setting aside the great risk of fire. We are making every exertion we can for the collecting of material this winter for the New House, and early as possible the ensuing spring we shall commence a raised stone foundation therefor to bring it on a level with the present Mess House, the floor of which you are aware is about the level of the last floods—or the centre floor of the old Factory yard."

— Chief Factor Miles, by letter to George Simpson, Jan. 10, 1840.

Today, the Staff House is the oldest of the structures remaining from that early fur-trading period on Moose Factory Island.



The Moose Factory Post in the mid-1940's. Note the Post Manager's House (1832-34; now demolished) in the background.



Early days at Moose Factory

Moose Factory is the oldest English-speaking community in Ontario. In 1673, Governor Charles Bayly built a wintering house on the island. In succeeding years, a major trading post was established on the island to accompany those at Rupert's House, Fort Albany and Fort Nelson, around the periphery of James and Hudson's Bay. The post was seized by the French and re-taken by the English several times, prior to 1730 when it was moved upriver to its present location.

The Staff House

The foundations of the new house were dug in October 1847 and a stone foundation built the next spring. In 1849, the post journal — the daily log kept by the post manager — records the use of materials within the house:

"The weight of the Foundation is about 50 Tons measurement of the stones boated here and upper part cannot be less than 100 Tons more of brick and stone making a total of 150 Tons weight. Thirty barrels of lime is expended from the Foundation alone."

— Post Journal, October 10, 1849.

Interior of the Staff House, 1890 s.
This room presently holds an interpretive display for visitors.

The essential purpose of the new dwelling was the provision of housing for the post's 'gentlemen'. Initially, the Factory building would have accommodated everyone — company servants, officers, clerks, visitors — even the Factor. But overcrowding and the deterioration of the Factory had eventually led to the construction of separate Men's Houses on the post.

The new Officer's House was to continue to provide accommodation during the whole of its existence. Later in the century, it became the Clerk's House, providing permanent accommodation for Company clerks, and a clerk's office and surgery. Even during the early part of this century when the downstairs was in use as the Company store, the second floor housed ship's captains wintering at the post. The name Staff House came to be applied to the building following the removal of the Store in the 1920's. The building then functioned as a hostel to accommodate unmarried staff, and the flow of business visitors to the island.

The Ontario Heritage Foundation

The Staff House was donated by the Hudson's Bay Company to the Ontario Heritage Foundation in December 1977. The turning over ceremony, marked by the presence of the Lieutenant-Governor, the Honourable Pauline M. McGibbon, took place in August 1978.

The Ontario Heritage Foundation was established in 1968 to encourage the conservation of Ontario's cultural heritage. Its resources, derived from public funds and private donations, are used to hold, preserve and restore heritage property, and to aid those engaged in that process. The Foundation is a Crown agency reporting through the Ministry of Culture and Recreation.

Research and investigation

The Heritage Trust Branch of the Ministry is actively engaged in the first phase — the investigative phase — of a program of repair, to preserve and return the Staff House to active use.

The respect due a historic structure in the course of restoration may emerge only through a complete understanding of the structure. A detailed investigative probing is essential to produce the understanding necessary to deal competently with the complex task of restoring fragile historic fabric.



Archaeologists derive a great deal of information from pits such as this. Excavation here indicates a layer of brick preceding erection of the Staff House.

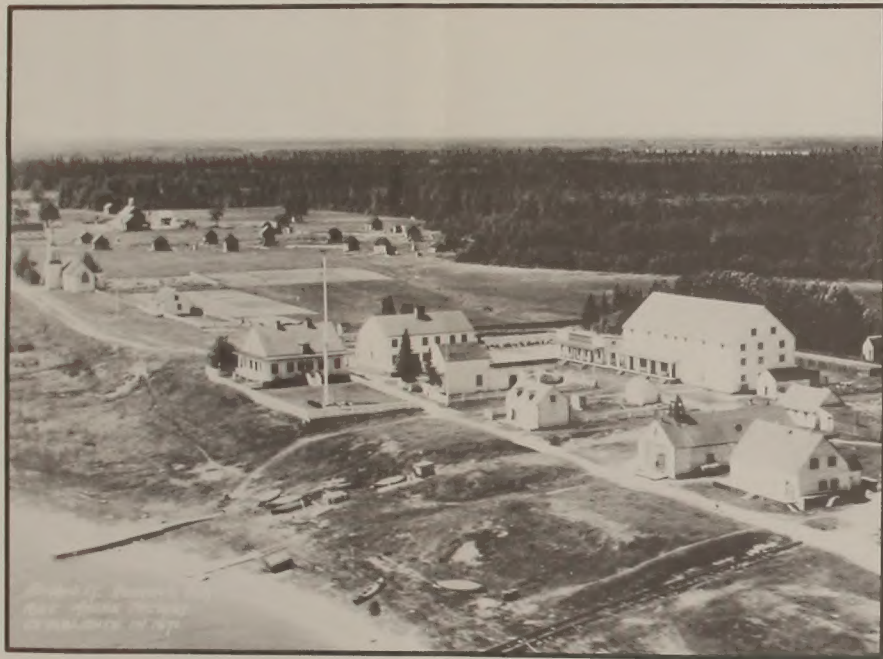
Seeing it happen

Visitors to the Staff House this summer will have the opportunity to view this first essential investigative phase while in process.

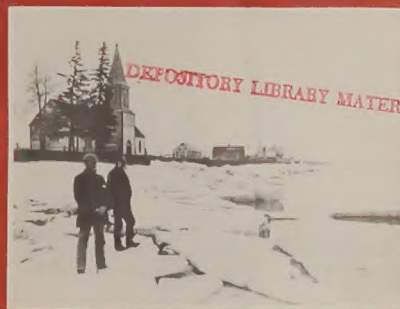
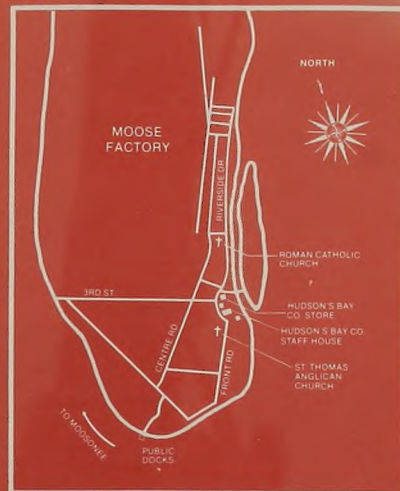
The efforts of historians, archaeologists and architects all focussed on the production of a composite picture of the Staff House and its changing uses over the course of 130 years, will be available for the casual scrutiny of the visitor. An interpretive display mounted within the house will feature the results of last year's investigative probes, including many of the early photographs culled from the various archives consulted, and artifacts uncovered by the archaeologists.

Efforts during the current season's work will focus on completion of the archaeological work begun during 1979. Members of the archaeological team will be on view to illustrate archaeological techniques, and occasionally to comment on the significance of the week's 'finds'. Visitors will also have the opportunity to view some of the repair measures necessary to stabilize physical deterioration within the building, particularly with respect to the "50 Ton" foundation.

The 19th century Moose Factory post was entirely intact as late as 1959. This photograph was taken in the mid 1930's.



Public Archives of Canada PA 9479



An early photograph of Moose Factory. Probably taken during the 1890's.

The Foundation acknowledges the co-operation of the Hudson's Bay Company in using and quoting from their archives.



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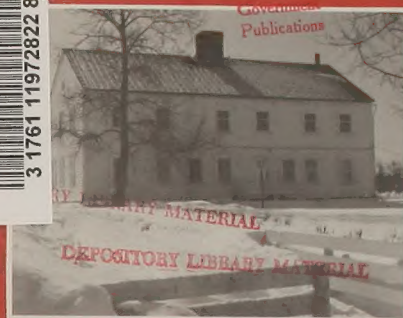
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THE HUDSON'S BAY CO. STAFF HOUSE

Moose Factory, Ontario



quote: "... Materials...to be collected for an Officer's House, after a plan now handed to Mr. Miles, to be on a line with the main house, distant 10 yards, the site to be part of the ground now occupied as a garden..."

— George Simpson, by letter to Chief Factor Miles, Aug. 15, 1843.



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